

FINANCING A CAPTIVE'S RANSOM IN LATE MEDIEVAL ARAGON

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ABSTRACT

Capture and Captivity were significant problems in the lands of the medieval Crown of Aragon, due to the ongoing struggle between Muslims and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula. This article addresses the question of how Christian captives and their families raised the large ransoms that were demanded for their release. The raising of a ransom often began with the captives or those acting on their behalf having to beg on the streets for the money. By the late fourteenth century, however, additional options had emerged to help those in need. Consequently, raising the money became a complex process whereby captives depended not only on their own resources and whatever they could beg for, but also whatever aid civic, ecclesiastical, and royal sources could provide.

A certain worthy lady had a husband whom she greatly loved, and he had been in captivity, and with a large sum of money had been redeemed. This lady sold all her possessions and those of her husband that she might pay the ransom, and, since this sufficed not, she went through the chief squares begging . . . As she begged she wept, and related to a great company of notable citizens the story of the captivity of her husband and the torment which he suffered in prison. Together with her she led four small children. All the citizens had pity upon this lady, giving her money, and consoling her in her tribulation.¹

The image described by Ramon Llull in *Blanquerna* repeated itself many times over in the cities of the Crown of Aragon: captives and their families begging to pay off a ransoming debt or to secure the liberation of a loved one. The sporadic warfare that was a part of life as Christians and Muslims sought to gain dominance over the Iberian peninsula generated a bounty of captured men and women, warriors and non-combatants. The multitudes of prisoners, or captives as the sources call them, in turn elicited a passionate response from Christians who sought to bring

* I would like to thank Peter Brown, James Brodman, William C. Jordan, Kenneth Mills, Kevin Munney and Teofilo Ruiz for their comments and suggestions.

¹ Ramon Llull. *Blanquerna*, ed. E.A. Peers (London, 1987), ch. 71.3.

their loved ones back home. The ransoms for these captives were often substantially greater than the average family could afford to pay and placed the victims in the difficult position of leaving a loved one in captivity or somehow raising the large sums. This article will address the question of how captives and their families raised a ransom in the lands of the Crown of Aragon in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

By the late Middle Ages, the problem of captivity was an ancient one in the Iberian peninsula. The Muslim invasion of Spain in 711 was the first act in a long struggle as Christian and Islamic forces fought each other for control of the peninsula. The large land battles and sieges that were especially common from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries were responsible for the captivity of large numbers of soldiers on both sides.² However, as pitched battles became increasingly more rare in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the low level conflict that endured—namely piracy and raiding—even during truces meant that not only soldiers but also noncombatants living along the frontiers and seacoasts were in constant danger of being captured. This could include everyone from sailors and fishermen who made their living from the sea to farmers, priests, mothers, and children who lived or traveled by land along coastal routes (pirates often disembarked and raided inland).³ Travelers, pilgrims, merchants, and native minority populations also made convenient targets who sometimes found themselves imprisoned simply because they belonged to the wrong religion.

The growing concern over those Christians who were captured led to efforts to get them back. In the late tenth century, embryonic ransoming efforts began to appear in the Crown of Aragon, although these were limited in scope and effectiveness.⁴ By the early twelfth century crown-appointed officials, the *exeas* and *alfaqueques*, began to regularly exchange prisoners for both sides, and the kings and emirs allowed them a freedom of movement that very few others enjoyed.⁵

² For a good general introduction to the problem of captivity in Iberia see James Brodman, *Ransoming Captives in Crusader Spain: The Order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic Frontier* (Philadelphia, 1986) ch. 1.

³ María Dolores López Pérez, *La Corona de Aragón y el Magreb en el siglo XIV (1331-1410)* (Barcelona, 1995), 577-861, is especially good in reference to captives, especially 686-771 where she discusses Muslim piracy; Andrés Díaz-Borrás, *Los Orígenes de la Piratería Islámica en Valencia: La Ofensiva Musulmana Trecentista y la Reacción Cristiana* (Barcelona, 1993), passim.

⁴ Stephen Bensch, "From Prizes of War to Domestic Merchandise: The Changing Face of Slavery in Catalonia and Aragon, 1000-1300," *Viator*, 25 (1994), 69.

⁵ For overviews on the *exeas* and *alfaqueques*, see Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 7-8; Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, "La Redempció de captius a la corona Catalano-Aragonesa (Segle XIV)" in *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 15 (1985), 262-66; José Enrique López de

It was the late twelfth and early thirteenth century that witnessed the creation of the ransoming orders whose sole purpose was to secure the release of captured Christians.⁶ The origins of the ransoming orders can be found in the military orders that thrived in Spain and the crusader states in the twelfth century. However, these military and hospitaller orders, such as the Knights of Santiago and the Hospital of the Holy Redeemer, enjoyed a fairly limited lifespan as ransoming orders.⁷ They were eclipsed by the Trinitarians (founded 1198) and Mercedarians (founded no later than 1230) as the primary agents for the ransoming of captives. These two orders dominated the ransoming efforts for the rest of the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century.

By the fourteenth century, however, the issue of captivity had further galvanized the Christian communities of Aragon—indeed of Christian Iberia—into action and several additional institutions were in place to help those in need. Consequently, the captives and their families were not alone in their efforts to raise the ransom. Civic and ecclesiastical institutions such as the Crown, municipal councils, and local churches played an important part in aiding them. These institutions, for their part, depended on the charitable inclination of individual Christians who responded to the plight of captives with alms, testamentary donations, and other monetary gifts.

Ransoms were costly and beyond the means of most people who needed them. They placed a significant, sometimes crushing, economic burden on captives and their families. Commenting on the high prices

Coca Casta er, "Institutions on the Castilian Granadan Frontier, 1369-1482" in *Medieval Frontier Societies* ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (Oxford, 1989), 137-41; José María Ramos y Loscertales, *El Cautiverio en la Corona de Aragón durante los Siglos XIII, XIV y XV* (Zaragoza, 1915), 154-56; Juan Torres Fontes, "Los Alfaqueques Castellanos en la frontera de Granada" in *Homenaje a Don Agustín Millares Carlos*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1975), 2: 99-116; and Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale, Tome Premier, vol. I: Péninsule Ibérique-France* (Brugge, 1955), 153.

⁶ James Brodman "Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest, 1180-1250," *Military Affairs*, 44 (1980), 24-28.

⁷ Brodman, "Military Redemptionism and the Castilian Reconquest," 24-25; Ramos y Loscertales, *El Cautiverio*, 156-61; for a good overview of the Order of Mountjoy see Alan Forey's, "The Order of Mountjoy," *Speculum*, 46 (1971), 250-66. Other military orders were also active in the ransoming process, but they mostly limited their activities to ransoming for profit, as opposed to ransoming for charity. See Joseph Delaville Le Roulx's, *Cartulaire General de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint Jean de Jerusalem*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1894-1906), docs. 1410 (May 16, 1212), 1434 (Feb. 1215), and 1861 (May 8, 1227) for some representative examples of the ransoming work conducted by the Knights Hospitallers. For a more nuanced study of the ransoming activities of the military orders, see Alan Forey, "The military orders and the Spanish Reconquest in the 12th and 13th Centuries," *Traditio*, 40 (1984), 197-234.

that his fellow Muslims set for Christian captives, the Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldūn noted that the prices were often very high, making it exceedingly difficult for the Christians to raise the amount.⁸ The many factors that could affect the ransom price—social station of the captive, who his captors were, location of captivity, age, sex, and skills among others—make it particularly challenging to give specific figures that can stand for all captives during the period covered here. Thus, the following figures are only rough guidelines based on a small number of captives for whom a ransom amount has survived. Between 1374 and 1399, the median ransom price for Aragonese captives was around 2230 sous (111£) although the average was much higher hovering around 3066 sous (153£). The median ransom price had increased to about 2380 sous (119£), by the first quarter of the fifteenth century, but the average price had come down to 2722 sous (136£).⁹ A ransom price of 2500 sous (125£) will do for our purposes here providing a foundation against which to measure the economic price of captivity for an average family.¹⁰ It is important to note that these prices had increased by at least over 1200% since the end of the thirteenth century when the typical ransom fluctuated between seven and ten pounds.¹¹

In the early fifteenth century, an unskilled laborer might earn about two and one-half sous a day—a wage that could add up to about 750 sous (39£) of annual income if he was lucky enough to work over 300 days a year, an almost impossible proposition.¹² A master carpenter could command over five and one-half sous a day, but this rate was at the high end of craftsmen salaries. More typical were the wages of master stonecutters and masons, who earned between four and four and one-half sous day. The income of other workmen and journeymen mirrored those of the unskilled laborers. Salaried public officials had more

⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Histoire des Berbères et des Dynasties Musulmanes de l'Afrique Septentrionale* trans. Baron de Slane (Paris, 1934), 3: 117.

⁹ The discrepancy in the averages may be explained by two unusually high ransoms between the 1374-1399, one valued at 8500 sous (425£) for a courtier and the other at 9000 sous (450£) for another government official.

¹⁰ This figure may well be on the conservative side since it is based on amounts listed in the begging licenses. The licenses recorded the amount of money that the family needed to raise and not the actual price of the ransom.

¹¹ Brodman, *Ransoming of Captives*, 106.

¹² This estimate and those that follow are based on the figures provided by Earl J. Hamilton, *Money, Prices, and Wages in Valencia, Aragón, and Navarre, 1351-1500* (Philadelphia, 1975), appendixes 9 and 10. The estimate assumes 300 workdays and the figures are for Valencia. Laborers earned less in smaller cities or areas with more modest economies. In Aragón proper, for example, an unskilled laborer earned around 25£ a year in 1405.

stable incomes, but few of them got rich from their wages. A granary guard, for example, received about five hundred sous (25£) in annual income. A warehouseman made about six hundred sous (30£) and a notary could command about 1600 sous (80£) a year. At the other end of the pay scale, janitors, trumpeters, and messengers earned ninety, 180, and 240 sous a year respectively, although these were probably part time jobs that allowed the individual to have another source of income.

Sailors, due to their exposed positions on ships, often fell into captivity and their income depended on their position in a ship's hierarchy. Oarsmen were the worst paid, receiving between forty to sixty sous a month in the 1380s and sixty-six sous a month in 1415.¹³ By comparison, the wages of the craftsman responsible for the upkeep of the ship's oars, the *remolar*, began at 120 sous a month; the barber-surgeon could command about 100 sous; while the captain earned about 200 sous a month.¹⁴ Daily allotments of rations augmented the sailors' income. Complicating this assessment of sailors' wages is that many hired on for a share of the profit of a voyage. This could be very lucrative, especially if they engaged in contraband or piracy, but it could also be disastrous. Not only did sailors have to contend with the perils of sea travel cutting into their gains, but if the expedition made no profit, the law obligated the seamen to pay the ship's owner for the rations he had provided them.¹⁵ And, of course, all these salaries assume steady employment year-round, which would have been very difficult to maintain.

The next question that arises concerns the buying power of these incomes. In the early fifteenth century, the household of a Catalan merchant spent about two hundred sous (10£) a year feeding and clothing each family member, a figure that did not include expenditures on wine or spices.¹⁶ It is reasonable to suggest that less affluent families spent between 120 and 150 sous a year on each family member, for a total of between 480 and 600 sous for a family of four. This sum does not take into account rents (an extra 100 to 200 sous a year) or extraordinary expenses. A few simple calculations show that when we allow for expenses, some households with single incomes had very little additional money

¹³ See López Pérez, *La Corona de Aragón y el Magreb*, 824-25 for the figures from the 1380s; Jacqueline Guiral-Hadziiosif, *Valence: port méditerranéen au XV^e siècle (1410-1525)* (Paris, 1986), p. 230 for 1415.

¹⁴ López Pérez, *La Corona de Aragón*, 824-25.

¹⁵ Stanley Jados, *The Consulate of the Sea and Related Documents* (University, Alabama, 1975), ordinance 247.

¹⁶ Teresa María Vinyoles i Vidal, *La vida quotidiana a Barcelona vers 1400* (Barcelona, 1985), 185-86.

to divert to emergencies such as the captivity of a family member. Admittedly, many households had other sources of income, but usually these would have been secondary and not near as great as the wages earned by the male head of the household. With these figures and exceptions, it is possible to suggest a yearly sum of 650 sous (32.5£) as reasonable living expenses needed by a family of four. When that is subtracted from the salaries calculated above, the following figures emerge.

Table 6.1: Salaries in the Crown of Aragón, c. 1400

Profession	Yearly Salary	Disposable Income
Laborer/Journeyman	750 sous	100 sous
Master Carpenter	1650 sous	1000 sous
Master Mason	1200-1350 sous	500-750 sous
Guard	500 sous	-150 sous
Warehouseman	600 sous	-50 sous
Notary	1600 sous	950 sous
Janitor	90 sous	-540 sous
Trumpeter	180 sous	-470 sous
Messenger	240 sous	-410 sous
Oarsman	470-720 sous	-180 – + 70 sous
<i>Remolar</i>	1440 sous	790 sous
Barber-Surgeon	1200 sous	550 sous
Captain	2400 sous	1750 sous

It is now possible to make some rudimentary observations on the impact that captivity had on a working family in the Crown of Aragón around 1400. Based on the ransom price of 2500 sous (125£), an unskilled laborer would have needed about twenty-five years of accumulating his disposable income to ransom a loved one or to pay off the debt of his own ransom if he was the unlucky one who fell into captivity. A master craftsman had to save from two to five years to reach the necessary amount. A well-paid oarsman had almost no chance to raise the money in his working lifetime since it would have required over thirty-five years of saving to ransom someone based on his salary. A ship's captain, on the other hand, could raise the necessary money in less than a year and a half. Individuals engaged in the least paying professions would have found it next to impossible to acquire the necessary sum for a ransom from their own wages. Although unskilled laborers and those at the bottom of the earning hierarchy usually had smaller ransoms to pay, the difference in price was not great enough to be a

big relief, reducing their time in captivity by perhaps five or ten years. Of course, in times of emergency families could cut back on spending, other family members could take jobs, or relatives could be persuaded to help. But how far would that go? Could it cut the time needed to raise the ransom in half? Ten or fifteen years in captivity, in the case of the poorer families, are still a very long time. Moreover, since the majority of captives were male, the man's income is what was often lost when a family member became captive. The rest of the family would have had a difficult time feeding themselves, let alone raising a large ransom. Loans could help, but only the most generous money-lender would extend a loan to a family that had almost no chance of repaying it. Moreover, loans had to be repaid. The point here is that for most families, having to raise a ransom equaled economic disaster and hardship. It was under these overwhelming circumstances that families turned to begging and charitable donations.

Raising a ransom was often a long and difficult process for the families of captives. For those who lacked independent means, the bulk of the ransom would be raised by begging on the streets, by soliciting secular and ecclesiastical officials for aid, by appealing to the executors of estates, and sometimes by asking the ransoming orders for funds. Most ransoms were raised by combining money from all of these sources. Thus, a typical ransom would include whatever contribution the captive's family could make as well as alms collected from the faithful, donations received from wills that set aside money specifically for ransoming, and in some cases contributions provided by civic groups, municipal councils, ecclesiastical officials, the orders, and royal grants. The following pages will analyze each of these activities.

Begging was a regulated activity in the Crown of Aragón. Before taking to the streets, a captive or his family had to acquire a begging license, an authorization granting the bearer the right to beg for money without interference. These were typically issued by the king or one of his lieutenants. In some cases even ecclesiastical officials gave out begging licenses. The ecclesiastical licenses tended to be more restricted in scope than their secular counterparts, typically limited to the boundaries of the issuing diocese. In almost every other respect, however, they were identical to the royal licenses. Thus, in 1431, the bishop of Barcelona granted a license to Pedro Corneller who was languishing in a Bugiot prison and whose faith was apparently wavering.¹⁷ Another license issued

¹⁷ Barcelona, Arxiu Diocesà de Barcelona [hereafter ADB], *Gratiarum*, 1431-1432: 71r (Sept. 17, 1431).

by the bishop that same year to Bernardo Puig, captive in Tunis, allowed begging for the rather large sum of 270*£*.¹⁸

Typical licenses were formulaic documents that included the name of the beggar—if a family member or friend was doing the begging—and the name of the captive. They usually recorded the ransom amount, and often had a time limit, expiring two to three years after the date of issue.¹⁹ The licenses were also the most common type of aid that the Crown furnished, turning up often in the royal registers. One of the scribes working in the chancery of Alfonso IV (reigned 1416-1458) captured their frequency and his bureaucratic boredom by indifferently titling one “another begging license.”²⁰

The licenses reveal other information. They highlight the hardships that captives endured, intending thereby to convince the faithful of the captives' need. Among the most frequent torments that the licenses listed were hunger, thirst, cold, and chains.²¹ A good example that can stand for many is the license given to Berengar Cristofol.

Berengar Cristofol, a neighbor of Valencia who was recently captured by faithless Saracens, while sailing in the sea off Alicante, and led captive to the city of Bugie where he suffers diverse hardships, and, he wishes to ransom himself at any price so that he may be able to free himself and not abjure the faith of Christ, but his own resources do not suffice for paying off this ransom since he is a pauper unless the faithful of Christ help him with alms.²²

The evocation of these torments and the specter or religious conversion was intended to resonate with the Christian donors upon whom the captives depended for their alms, for those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, and clothed the naked would “inherit the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world.” On the other

¹⁸ ADB, Gratiarum, 1431-1432: 11v (undated, but due to its place in the register, certainly from 1431).

¹⁹ Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó [hereafter ACA], Cancillería Real [hereafter C], reg. 1895: 105r-106r (Dec. 4, 1388)—published in Ferrer i Mallol, “La Redempció” doc. 3.

²⁰ “Alia licencia acaptandi,” in ACA, C, reg. 2585: 112v-113r (Sept. 22, 1416).

²¹ See among the many examples ACA, C, reg. 2180: 59v-60r (June 8, 1406); ACA, C, reg. 2208: 81v-82r (April 16, 1410); ACA, C, reg. 2586: 149v (Jan. 25, 1418); ACA, C, reg. 3150: 74r-v (undated).

²² ACA, C, reg. 2204: 53v-54r (Oct. 8, 1406): “Berengario Cristofol vicino civitate Valenciae qui nuper navigando fuit per infideles saracenos in mari de Alacant captivatus et captivus ductus ad civitatem Bugie ubi diversa desolancia sustinet et ut ab ipsis liberari valeat et fide Christi non abneget cupit se rescatare aliquo precio ad quod rescatum exsolvendum proprie facultates sibi non suppetat cum sit pauperum nisi Christi fidelium adjuvet elemosiniis.”

hand, the Gospel promised “everlasting punishment” in a “fire prepared for the devil and his angels” to those who turned away from the needy in their hour of distress.²³ Beside this not so subtle, and frightening, suggestion, the licenses often reminded Christians of their moral responsibility to captives in an opening clause that linked their eternal salvation to their charitable deeds.²⁴

Closely linked to the rewards (and punishments) offered in the begging licenses were indulgences that the Church also promised to those who gave alms to captives. As early as 1245, Pope Innocent IV had promised a penitential reduction for anyone who gave alms to the Mercedarians and Trinitarians.²⁵ For the remainder of the thirteenth century the papacy continued to offer newer and typically more generous indulgences to anyone who contributed alms to the ransoming orders.²⁶ By the fourteenth century, the practice had spread and the Church was granting indulgences to anyone who gave money for ransoms, not just those who gave alms to the ransoming orders. Thus, in 1370, the bishop of Barcelona gave indulgences to anyone who helped the bearer of one of his begging licenses to ransom his wife, son, and father-in-law from captivity in Granada.²⁷

Many licenses were only valid for a limited period of time. This often meant that captives who needed to raise large sums of money had to request new licenses or extensions. This was the case of Stefan Moliner who received a begging license on July 31, 1417 to raise 600 doblas (510£) to ransom his mother and six brothers who were being held in Bugie. Moliner and his wife Isabel had also been among those captured, but had been able to pay 400 doblas (340£) for their release. Once released, they set about to ransom the other family members.²⁸ One and one-half years later, their task was still unfinished since the Crown gave them another begging license. The first one was due to

²³ Matthew 25: 31-46.

²⁴ See, for example, ACA, C, reg. 1895: 105r-106r (Dec. 4, 1388); published in Ferrer, “La Redempció,” doc. 3; also ACA, C, reg. 2206: 11v-12r (Jan. 27, 1409).

²⁵ For the Mercedarians see James Brodman, “The Rhetoric of Ransoming: A Contribution to the debate over Crusading in Medieval Iberia,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusades* ed. by Michael Gervers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, 2001), 47; for the Trinitarians see Porres Alonso, *Libertad a los Cautivos*, 1: 135.

²⁶ Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 100; Bonifacio Porres Alonso, *Libertad a los Cautivos: Actividad Redentora de la Orden Trinitaria*, 2 vols. (Córdoba & Salamanca, 1998), 1: 145-47.

²⁷ Sebastian Puig y Puig, *Episcopologio de la sede Barcinonense* (Barcelona, 1929), doc. 122 (Oct. 21, 1370).

²⁸ ACA, C, reg. 2587: 97r-v (July 31, 1417).

expire in July 1419, two years from the date of its granting. The king, perhaps realizing the difficulty of their mission, granted the second license for three years.²⁹ Moliner and his family may have been well off, as suggests the initial, and considerable, sum of 400 doblas paid for the ransom of Stefan and his wife. However, when confronted with ransoming nine family members, none but the richest of families could hope to cope with such a demand.

Sometimes the licenses bear proof of their own effectiveness in helping raise money. In April 1408, Martí I (reigned 1395-1410) gave a license to Yvany Garcia for 210 doblas (178.5£).³⁰ This was not Garcia's first license. In 1406, he had received his first begging license that was to last for two years.³¹ By September 1409, he was the recipient of a third license issued in his name. As was the case with Stefan Moliner, the time afforded by the original license was insufficient for Garcia to raise the full amount of his ransom and he requested two extensions. The third license does suggest that Yvany was making impressive progress since it explicitly states that he only needed another forty-six doblas (39£) to finish paying off his debt.³² These three documents also allow us a glimpse into the time required to raise a ransom. Martí had granted the first license in April 1406 and the third one was due to expire in September 1411. In this case, slightly less than five and one-half years of begging and, we may assume, additional fund raising were needed to raise the ransom of one person.

Captives also benefited from testamentary bequests. Since at least 1255, the Church had been including captives among the "poor of Christ" and encouraging testamentary bequests to aid them.³³ Donors contributed their money in a myriad of ways. In some cases, testators left a specific amount for ransoming as part of "pro-anima" bequests, for the expiation of sins.³⁴ The notary Johan de Trillea, for example,

²⁹ ACA, C, reg. 2588: 166r-166v (Feb. 4, 1419).

³⁰ ACA, C, reg. 2205: 140r-v (April 10, 1408). At the bottom of a license granted to a Bartomeu Grimalt appears the following: "Similis licencia acaptandi fuit concessa sub eisdem data, signo atque mandato pro Yvanno Garsie dicte ville Oriola et pro simili rescato ducentarum duplarum." Although this description specifically says "200 doblas", the other two licenses issued to Yvany put the ransom price at 210 doblas.

³¹ ACA, C, reg. 2180: 59v-60r (June 8, 1406); published by Maria Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, *La Frontera amb l'Islam en el segle XIV: Cristians i Sarraïns al país Valencià* (Barcelona, 1988), doc. 229.

³² ACA, C, reg. 2206: 180r (Sept. 24, 1409).

³³ Brodman, "The Rhetoric of Ransoming," 46.

³⁴ For more on "pro-anima" bequests see Brodman, "What is a Soul Worth?" *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 20 (1993), 15-23.

assigned thirty sous for the ransom of captives in his will.³⁵ And Antonia, the wife of a merchant of Barcelona, made a similar provision in her will, leaving ten sous for “redeeming Christian captives.”³⁶

Others left bequests that were linked to burial expenses. A typical will contained a clause where the testator assigned a certain amount of money to cover the cost of his funeral and his memorial masses. Since these expenditures varied, there was usually money left over. Many people willed this money to charitable causes that included the redemption of captives. Johanna, the wife of a painter, instructed her executors to give, at their discretion, whatever remained from the ten £ she had set aside for her burial for “celebrating masses, redeeming captives, helping poor girls marry, and other worthy causes.”³⁷ Morgano Castello left similar instructions for the surplus money from his burial.³⁸

In many of these wills, donors grouped captives and unmarried poor girls together in their lists of benefactors.³⁹ Alfonso Garcia, after setting aside some money for his parish church, funding masses for his soul, and paying his executors, ordered the executors to sell his remaining assets and distribute the money “celebrating masses for [his] soul, ransoming Christian captives in the power of the Saracens, and helping poor girls marry.”⁴⁰ Elisenda, the wife of a farmer, had the remnants of her chattel divided into three equal parts, one of which went to ransoming captives and another which she bequeathed to unmarried girls.⁴¹ In these transactions, the captives and the unmarried girls formed a second tier of beneficiaries that clearly fell behind paupers and religious institutions in the hierarchy of giving. This may be because donors did not consider captives to have the same intercessory capacity in the after-

³⁵ Barcelona, Arxiu de Protocols de Barcelona [hereafter AHPB], Francesc de Manresa, Llibre de Testaments, Oct. 4, 1401-Sept. 3, 1424: 83v-86r (May 13, 1416).

³⁶ AHPB, Pere de Pellisser, Liber Testamentorum, July 7, 1395-May 28, 1435: 32r-33v (May 19, 1410).

³⁷ AHPB, Bernat Pi, Llibre de Testaments, March 17, 1408-April 10, 1430: 42v-43v (May 29, 1417).

³⁸ AHPB, Bernat Pi, Llibre de Testaments, Oct. 13, 1405-Aug. 30, 1442: 85r-86v (Aug. 9, 1434).

³⁹ For a brief study of the relationship between captives and unmarried girls in charitable donations see José Sanchez-Herrero, “La acción benéfica de las cofradías durante los siglos XIV al XVII: la redención de cautivos y la dotación de doncellas para el matrimonio,” in *Religiosidad Popular en España* 2 vols. (Madrid, 1997), 1: 163-91.

⁴⁰ AHPB, Bernat Pi, Llibre de Testaments, March 17, 1408-April 10, 1430: 23v-24v (Aug. 16, 1414).

⁴¹ AHPB, Pere de Folgueres, Liber Testamentorum, Oct. 13, 1405-Aug. 30, 1442: 89r-v (Feb. 4, 1417).

life that paupers or mendicants had. For example, much of the money given to the poor required that paupers pray for the soul of their benefactor or escort their funeral bier. Captives never had any of these preconditions imposed on them. In other words, although certainly worthy of charity, captives do not seem to have delivered the same returns as did paupers in the calculus of salvation.

A question arises as to how money from wills made its way to those families that needed it. In reality, it appears that most of the money wound up in the coffers of the ransoming orders. The orders could then use the money for their own ransoming expeditions or turn it over to individual captives as the need arose and resources permitted. This issue, however, has been little studied in the secondary literature. I would tentatively suggest that during the time period covered by this article, the orders preferred to use the monetary resources that they controlled in their own ransoming expeditions (see below). However, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Mercedarians were very active in giving money subsidies to captives to help them with their ransoms.⁴²

Not all the money set aside in wills went directly to the ransoming orders, however. Some donors left the dispensation of the funds up to their executors. In these cases we may assume that captives or their agents had to apply for the funds with the executor who then dispensed funds to the supplicants. A good example comes from Valencia where the city council was helping to raise the ransom of Pere Alfonso, a captive in Algiers. The city had already provided all the help that it could, yet that had not been enough to complete the formidable ransom of 241 doblas (205£). Consequently, the council wrote to the executors of the will of a lady from Terol asking that they turn over to Pere the ten £ that the deceased had set aside for ransoming captives.⁴³ A similar process may have taken place after the death of Elisenda, the wife of a Catalan merchant. She instructed her executors to set aside the generous sum of 100£ for the ransom of captives. The executors would then distribute 1£ to each captive.⁴⁴

Finally, some donors left money for individual captives, typically family members. When Ramon Eimeric notarized his will, he assigned 11£ to "Francisco Macanet, a sailor of Barcelona who was being held captive

⁴² Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, 105-7.

⁴³ Agustín Rubio-Vela, *Epistolari de la Valencia Medieval*, 2 vols. (Valencia, 1985 and 1998), doc. II: 145 (May 25, 1441).

⁴⁴ AHPB, Pere de Pellisser, *Liber Testamentorum*, July 7, 1395-May 28, 1435: 40r-46r (July 21, 1412).

by the Saracens in Bugie.”⁴⁵ In the spring of the following year, Ramon’s wife, Francisca, also left money to Francisco Macanet, in this case, fifty sous.⁴⁶ The document is not explicit, but Francisco and Francisca may have been related.⁴⁷ In a similar case, Clara Gelat assigned one hundred sous to Gabriel Ponc, her brother, who was a captive in Algeciras.⁴⁸

Aside from the begging done by captives and their families and the money left in wills, there were other sources of revenues available for ransoming. Many captives turned to their monarch for aid. By far the most common type of aid that a captive could expect from the Crown were the aforementioned begging licenses.⁴⁹ However, on certain occasions, the supplicant could compel the monarch to help with money, sometimes enough to raise the entire ransom. In 1377, Pere the Ceremonious (reigned 1336-1387) granted the large sum of twenty thousand sous (about 1,000£), to Gualdo Cevilone, a member of his court (*domicellus*).⁵⁰ Joan I (reigned 1387-1395) gave fifty £ to a man from Orihuela to aid in his “ransom and redemption, since Saracens had captured and imprisoned him.”⁵¹ And, in 1415, Fernando I (reigned 1412-1416) ordered the *baile* of Valencia to turn over thirty £ to the wife of Guillem Tallada, so that she could ransom him from captivity in Tunis.⁵²

When these large quantities were not forthcoming from the king himself, families turned to the royal almoner. The alms they received were pitifully small and families had to request the aid in writing.⁵³ The typ-

⁴⁵ AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Liber Testamentorum, July 1385-Dec. 1397: 93r-94r (Aug. 22, 1394).

⁴⁶ AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Liber Testamentorum, July 1385-Dec. 1397: 101v-103r (April 3, 1395).

⁴⁷ Francisca also left money to a Pedro Macanet, whom she identifies as “consanguineo germano meo.”

⁴⁸ AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Liber Testamentorum, July 1385-Dec. 1397: 60r-61r (Aug. 20, 1390).

⁴⁹ Kings could provide additional assistance such as making diplomatic appeals to their Muslim counterparts for the release of captives or including the release of captives as part of truce agreements. But since these and other types of assistance do not address the issue of raising a ransom, I have opted to leave them out of this discussion.

⁵⁰ ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Pedro III, box 54: 6616 (Jan. 7, 1377).

⁵¹ ACA, C, reg. 1888: 116r (Oct. 11, 1395); “in aiutorium siu rescati seu redemptionis, cum fuerit captus et captivatus per sarraceni,” published in Ferrer, *La Frontera amb l’Islam*, doc. 172.

⁵² ACA, C, reg. 2415: 44r (Feb. 9, 1415): “donets e paguets a dona Guillermona mulier d’en Guillem Tallada trenta doblas d’or los quals per vos li bolem. . . donats en ajuda del rescat d’en Guillem Tallada fill d’en Guillem Tallada de la vila d’Almatorra qui es preso et captiu en la ciutat de Tuniz terra de moros.”

⁵³ Agustín Altisent, *L’almonie reial a la corte de Pere de Ceremoniós: Estudi i edició dels manuscrits de l’almoier fra Guillem Deude, monjo de Poblet (1378-1385)* (Poblet, 1969), pp. xxxviii-

ical donation given out in 1383 was one florin (11 sous).⁵⁴ In one case, the petitioner received five florins, but the unfortunate man was raising money to pay for his ransom and that of his wife and children.⁵⁵ The amount given also fluctuated based on the availability of funds. In 1384 and 1385, for example, the typical grant was five florins. Even with these greater sums, it would have taken a great deal of additional begging to raise the ransoms.

The Crown also indirectly provided money for families by asking, or sometimes forcing, the ransoming orders to turn over some of their funds for the ransoms of specific captives.⁵⁶ Kings ordinarily employed these strong-arm tactics when close associates of the Crown were in captivity. In 1389, Joan I demanded that the Mercedarians and Trinitarians provide 150 doblas (127.5£) towards the ransom of the son of Pedro Morera, a royal counselor whom pirates from Barbary had captured and who had subsequently left his son as a hostage while he raised the ransom. The king's request left the orders little recourse since he pointed out that it was his decision that they turn over some of the money they were collecting in his realm to aid Morera.⁵⁷ In 1395, he asked the Mercedarians for five hundred florins (275£) for the ransom of Berenguer de Lacera ("domèstich e familiar nostre"). The order, for unknown reasons, did not provide the money promptly, causing John to threaten the Master with retaliation if he did not comply.⁵⁸ About two months later, but with less thunder in his voice, John again asked the Mercedarians to contribute money to a private ransom; this time the sum was two hundred florins (110£) for two captive Franciscans.⁵⁹

xxxix; see also Miguel Gual, "La Asistencia a los Pobres en la Corte de Pedro IV, El Ceremonioso" in *A pobresa e a assistência aos pobres na península Ibérica durante la idade Média* (Lisbon, 1973), 1: 479-81.

⁵⁴ Altisent, *L'almoïna real*, 183, 186, 190.

⁵⁵ Altisent, *L'almoïna real*, 171.

⁵⁶ For a brief overview see Regina Sáinz de la Maza Lasoli, "Los Mercedarios en la Corona de Aragón durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIV," *Miscellanea de Textos Medievales* 4 (1988), 238; and James Brodman, "Ransomers or Royal Agents: The Mercedarians and the Aragonese Crown in the 14th Century" in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages* ed. P.E. Chevedden, D.J. Kagay and P.G. Padilla (Leiden, 1996), 248.

⁵⁷ ACA, C, reg. 1871: 146r-v (Feb. 1, 1389): "havem acordat que es nuestra voluntat que del accapte que se fa en la senyoria per reaurer catius cristians de la terra de moros per les frates de la vostra orde sien donats al dit mossen P. Morera cent cinquanta dobles d'or en ayude de pagar son rescate."

⁵⁸ ACA, C, reg. 1967: 25r-v (April 29, 1395); published in Sáinz, "Los Mercedarios," doc. 41.

⁵⁹ ACA, C, reg. 1887: 135v-136r (June 17, 1395); published by Sáinz, "Los Mercedarios," doc. 43.

In spite of these philanthropic examples, spending money for ransoming captives was not always a top priority of the kings of Aragon. At a time when the families of Christian captives were begging for ransom money through the kingdom and captives themselves were pleading for help from their prisons in Tunis or Granada, Joan I's queen, Violant de Bar, was giving 300 florins to a court favorite to aid his upcoming matrimony.⁶⁰ Joan himself gave 1,000 florins to another member of his court as a gift, money that could have gone for the ransom of five or six captives.⁶¹ Martí I busied himself endowing one of the queen's ladies with a 1,000-florin gift for her wedding.⁶² A few days later he awarded 500 florins to a sergeant-at-arms for a recent promotion.⁶³ Two weeks after that, he presented 160 florins to a counselor for the purchase of a horse, an amount that would have sufficed to free one or two captives.⁶⁴ Captives and their families did receive financial aid from the Crown, but acquiring the freedom of a captive often competed with, and lost out to other "needs."⁶⁵

Other groups and institutions also raised money for captives or contributed to their ransoms. Civic confraternities and guilds were among the most active.⁶⁶ The shoemakers' guild in Valencia, for example, stipulated in its bylaws that if "any member, through his sins or due to disaster, became a captive and in good faith was unable to pay his ransom, then each member, for the love of God and in the name of charity, would contribute two *sous* for the ransom."⁶⁷ Other guilds in other cities in the Aragonese confederacy had similar requirements including tailors, blacksmiths, leather workers, butchers, ironsmiths, silversmiths, and carpenters.⁶⁸ One interesting example was the *Cofradía Real de Barcelona para hacer cruzada contra sarracenos* (Royal Confraternity of Barcelona for

⁶⁰ ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Juan I, box 6: 617 (Jan. 10, 1392).

⁶¹ ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Juan I, box 6: 621 (1392).

⁶² ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Martín I, box 2: 181 (May 15, 1399).

⁶³ ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Martín I, box 2: 187 (May 26, 1399).

⁶⁴ ACA, C, Cartas Reales, Martín I, box 2: 190 (June 10, 1399).

⁶⁵ For a similar criticism see Miguel Gual, "La Asistencia a los Pobres en la Corte de Pedro IV, El Ceremonioso," in *A pobresa e a assistência aos pobres na península Ibérica durante la idade Media* (Lisbon, 1973), 1: 463.

⁶⁶ José Sánchez Herrero, "La acción benéfica de las cofradías durante los siglos XIV al XVII: la redención de cautivos y la dotación de doncellas para el matrimonio" in *Religiosidad Popular en España* 2 vols. (Madrid, 1997) I: 163-191; Verlinden, *L'esclavage*, 1: 538-39.

⁶⁷ Prospero de Bofarull y Mascaró, *Colección de documentos inéditos del Archivo General de la Corona de Aragón*, 41 vols. (Barcelona, 1847-1910), vol 40, doc. 17 (Sept. 1329).

⁶⁸ See Bofarull, *Colección de Documentos*, vol. 40, docs. 4, 14, 17-23, 26-27, 45-47, 52, 59, 64. The dates range from 1298 to 1392.

Crusading against Saracens.) The rich citizens (*rich homens*) of Catalunya founded it to "exalt the holy Catholic faith and for battling and to the detriment of the evil sect of Muḥammad."⁶⁹ Should the confraternity dissolve, however, all its revenues would devolve to ransoming. Even confraternities linked to universities had clauses that guaranteed its members aid should they fall "in the power of the Moors, enemies of the faith."⁷⁰

Some cities were very active in their efforts to ransom their citizens. Valencia, due to its exposed position on the coast in the southern reaches of the kingdom, led the way. The city had an organized municipal ransoming system since 1323. It raised money through the traditional methods of collection plates distributed throughout the city's parishes, wandering alms collectors, and testamentary bequests. The two citizens in charge of the program investigated each appeal for aid, and, if found worthy, paid out a sum that was not to exceed three hundred sous (15£). In order to qualify, the captive had to be a Christian, from Valencia, and had to show a financial need. The city did not engage itself in the actual ransom, which more traditional ransomers such as the orders, *exes*, or merchants handled. Valencia's archival records show that between 1375 and 1399, the city handed out 24,000 sous (1200£) to help over sixty captives, some of whom received more than one grant of money.⁷¹ Beyond these efforts, the city council could also give out money in unusual circumstances.⁷²

Valencia's concern for her captive sons and daughters was extraordinary, but it was by no means unique. In 1391, for example, the town council of Orihuela voted to give 100 florins for the ransom of one of its residents.⁷³ And in a similar situation in 1404 the southern town of Asp gave 100 florins to Bartomeu Grimault to help him with the ransom of his son Pere who had been captured in a raid.⁷⁴ Other frontier

⁶⁹ *Colección de Documentos*, vol. 40, doc. 14 (1315): "exaltació de la Santa Fe catholica et a impugnació et detriment de la malvada secta de Mahomet".

⁷⁰ Sánchez Herrero, "La acción benéfica de las cofradías," 167.

⁷¹ For a full account see Andrés Díaz Borrás "Notas sobre los primeros tiempos de la atención Valenciana a la redención de cautivos cristianos," *Estudis Catellonencs*, 3 (1986), 337-54, and "La Organización de la caridad redentiva en la ciudad de Valencia a finales del siglo XIV," in Francisco Toro Ceballos et al., *Estudios de Frontera: Alcalá la Real y el Arcipreste de Hita* (Jáen, 1996), 157-75.

⁷² Díaz Borrás, "Notas sobre los primeros tiempos" 348.

⁷³ Pedro Bellot, *Anales de Orihuela*, ed. Juan Torres Fontes (Orihuela, 1954), 175-76.

⁷⁴ The same raid claimed the life of Pere's wife and subsequently the town council also gave Bartomeu and additional 100 florins as a gracious gesture for the death of his daughter-in-law. The money, however, was not enough and in 1408, Martí I granted

communities have also left records of underwriting the cost of ransoms.⁷⁵

Beyond the charitable assistance described above, merchants could sometimes be convinced to grant loans. These loans were often part of a more comprehensive ransoming contract, whereby a merchant and his associates were hired to free someone. The merchant's services could include everything from loaning the ransom money to conducting the negotiations that led to the actual release to transporting the captive back to Christendom.⁷⁶ A typical contract engaged the merchant to ransom a captive from North Africa or Granada. The party acting on behalf of the captive made an advance payment, ordinarily about half the price of the ransom, and the agreement also included stipulations as to how the rest of the money would be paid. In 1394, for instance, Berenguer and Gabriel Barata concluded a contract with Pere Serra, a merchant from Barcelona for the liberation of Anthoni Mayens. Pere had advanced the ransom money, seventy-five pounds, to another merchant, Francisco Folquet, who was negotiating Mayens' ransom in Málaga. Berenguer and Gabriel Barata had already paid forty pounds and, according to the document, still owed thirty-five to Pere. They would pay the debt when Anthoni was free.⁷⁷

Sometimes the captives themselves convinced merchants conducting business in Muslim territories to loan them the amount of their ransoms. Such was the case of Marc de Venecia, a Sicilian merchant who had a difficult time in captivity. According to the begging license granted to him by Martí I, his captors had severed his left hand for refusing to convert to Islam. Eventually, some Christian merchants in Tunis advanced him the sum of sixty florins and he negotiated his release. His freedom may not have been much better than his captivity, for it is likely that he spent many of his remaining days begging through the cities and villages of Aragón and Catalunya where the alms received from people who took pity on his missing hand paid off the merchants

Grimalt a begging license for 200℥ (3,400 sous) to help with his son's ransom. See Ferrer i Mallof, *La Frontera amb l'Islam*, 217-218 for the background and doc. 238 for the published begging license. The original license is in ACA, C, reg. 2205: 140r-v (April 10, 1408).

⁷⁵ Juan de Mata Carriazo, "Relaciones fronterizas entre Jaen y Granada en el a o 1479" in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, 61 (1955), 41-45.

⁷⁶ For an introduction to merchants and their role in the ransoming efforts see López Pérez, *La Corona de Aragón y el Magreb*, 806-12.

⁷⁷ See AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Manual, Nov. 20, 1393-June 3, 1394: fol. 82v (May 6, 1394), published in Mitjà, "L'Orde de la Mercè," doc. VIII; AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Manual, Nov. 13, 1395-April 12, 1396: fol. 72r-v; AHPB, Bernat Nadal, Manual, Sept. 30, 1396-March 14, 1397: fol. 72r-73r (Feb. 5, 1397).

who had rescued him.⁷⁸ Nicolás Egidy from Valencia appealed to the king on similar grounds. Merchants had ransomed him from Granada at a cost of 125 doblas that he now saw himself obligated to pay, but, lacking the financial resources, he had to beg.⁷⁹

In considering the many ways that captives or their agents raised money, we should not forget that most of these methods were fraught with potential pitfalls that made the process much more difficult and in many cases hampered the ability of those collecting the alms to do their work. Oftentimes, the different options that were in place to aid captives canceled each other out as they, and other deserving groups, competed for a finite amount of charity. The conflicts that arose between the Mercedarians and Trinitarians in the fourteenth century and warnings inscribed in begging licenses that forbid the orders from interfering with the begging of individual captives are but two examples of this struggle over limited resources.⁸⁰ Individuals, who assumed the guise of captives in order to capitalize on the public pity, having never endured a day of captivity, stretched the resources even further.⁸¹ Even in the cases of testamentary bequests, the captives encountered problems as relatives contested wills or refused to turn over funds to the orders or to the captives' families.⁸²

The biggest hurdle, however, may have been the inescapable penury into which captivity drove many individuals and families. In the end, many captives and their loved ones probably experienced the same hardships as Ramon Llull's "worthy lady." Faced with the possibility of their loved ones dying in captivity or converting to Islam, many turned to begging and the other options that were available to them and tried to raise the ransoms by whatever means necessary hoping that their fellow citizens would take pity upon them, give them money, and console them in their tribulations.

⁷⁸ ACA, C, reg. 2208: 81v-82r (April 16, 1410).

⁷⁹ ACA, C, reg. 926: 54v-55r (June 10, 1374).

⁸⁰ The ransoming orders, which considered any charitable donation for captives to rightfully belong to them, sometimes proved to be the most troublesome obstructions to families or captives begging for money. Noting this, the Crown sometimes warned them about interfering with the begging efforts of captives on the begging licenses themselves. For warnings on the licenses see ACA, C, reg. 926: 54v-55r (June 10, 1374); 55r (June 10, 1374).

⁸¹ In 1389, for example, the Crown ordered the capture and punishment of fake captives who were usually fit young men, see ACA, C, reg. 1895: 243v-244v (May 4, 1389), published by Sainz, "Los Mercedarios" doc. 34. For an example from Castile see Porres-Alonso, *Libertad a los Cautivos*, doc. II: 10 (Feb. 27, 1311).

⁸² Porres Alonso, *Libertad a los Cautivos*, doc. II: 16 (Sept. 22, 1360); ACA, C, reg. 2132: 156v-157r (Nov. 22, 1401), published in Ferrer i Mallol, "La Redempció," doc. 6.